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HOW'S YOUR  
SECOND ACT?  
BY ARTHUR HOPKINS

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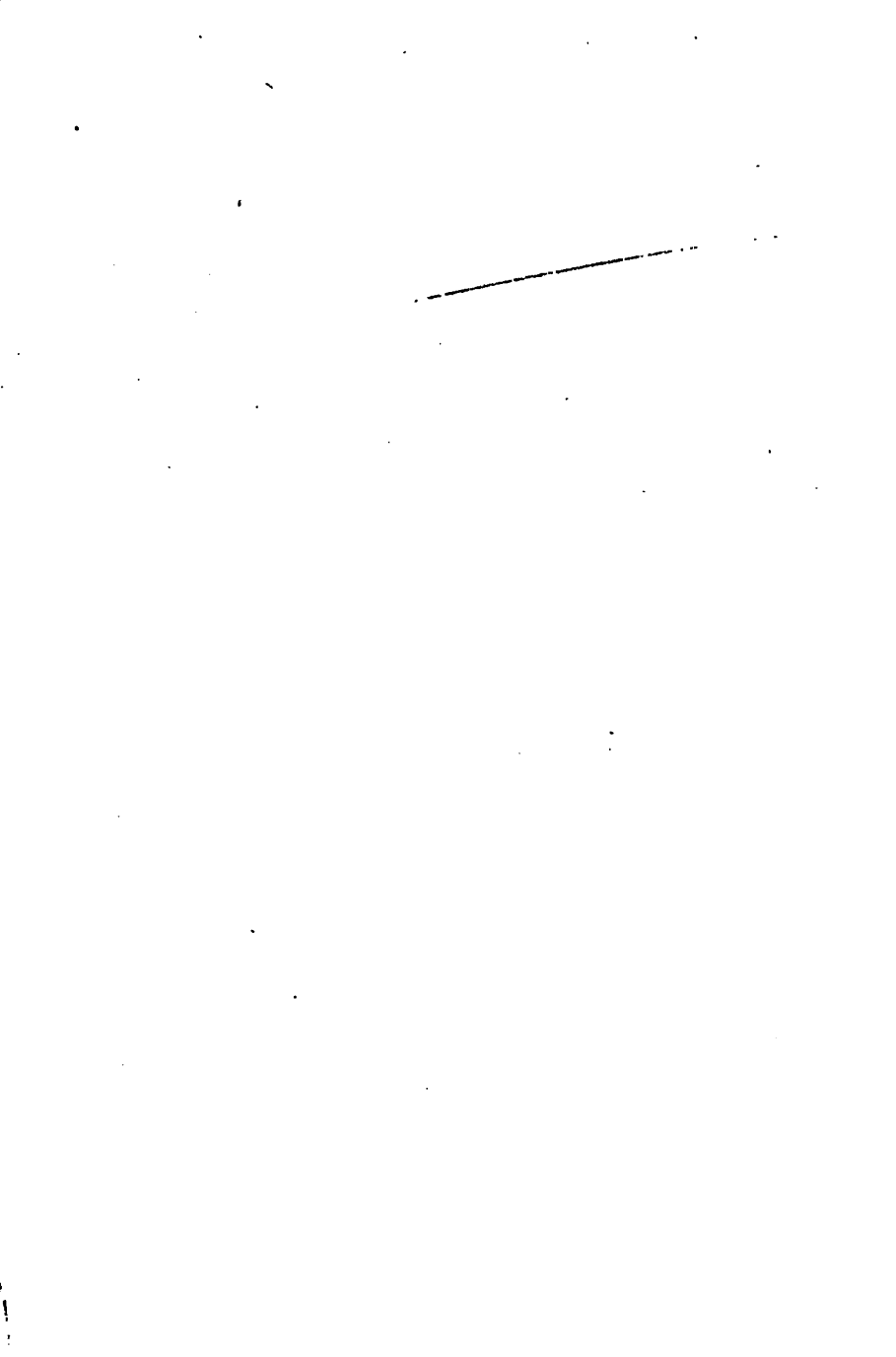
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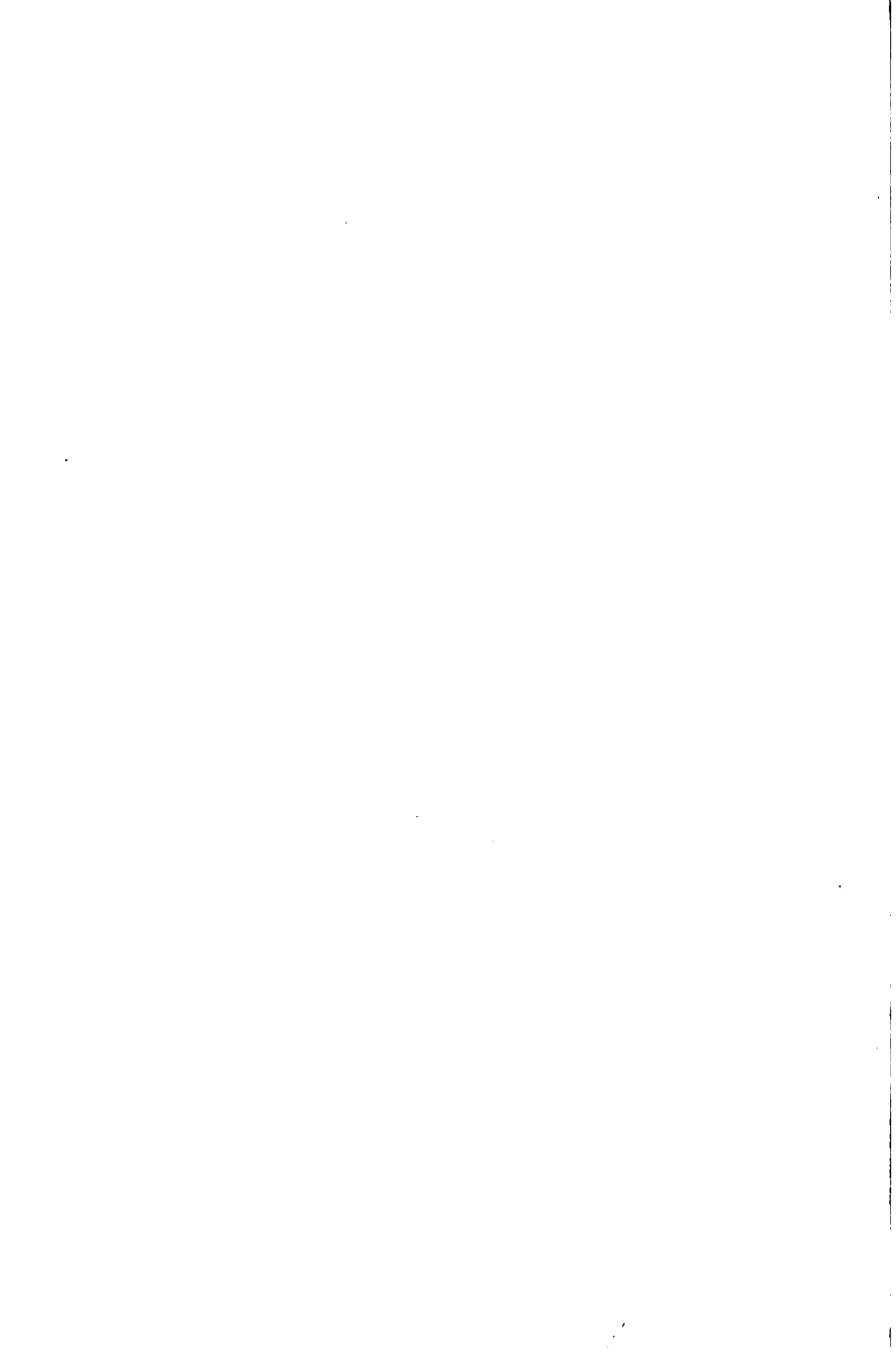
**ELLEN VAN VOLKENBURG**

and

**MAURICE BROWNE**

founders and directors of the  
Chicago Little Theatre  
directors, producers, actors and  
makers of plays





**HOW'S YOUR SECOND ACT?**

**PLAYS PRODUCED  
BY MR. HOPKINS**

**ON TRIAL  
THE POOR LITTLE RICH GIRL  
GOOD GRACIOUS ANNABELLE  
THE SUCCESSFUL CALAMITY  
THE GYPSY TRAIL**

# **HOW'S YOUR SECOND ACT? BY ARTHUR HOPKINS**

**WITH A FOREWORD BY  
GEORGE JEAN NATHAN**



**PHILIP GOODMAN COMPANY  
NEW YORK NINETEEN EIGHTEEN**



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## FOREWORD

One of the cardinal arguments—if not *the* cardinal argument—poised generally against the theatrical manager of the old order was that he was guilty of the gross misdemeanor of smoking large, black cigars and not merely that, but smoking them in his side teeth at a tilt of thirty-five degrees. The relevance of this devastating deposition has always baffled me, since it appears Mark Twain was guilty of the same *faux pas*, and yet at the same time contrived to be one of the greatest geniuses America has produced. True enough, the tilted cigar did not make of the old order manager a picture to cerise the cheek of the flapper nor to stimulate the esthetic sense of a Sargent, but it is still pretty difficult to figure out just what bearing it had upon his talent or, more pertinently, his lack of talent.

The fact remains, however, that cigar or no cigar, the theatrical manager of the yesterday is rapidly passing out of the

field of drama. He is passing out of the field of drama, where he doubtless never belonged, and into the field of theatre management, the field in which he had his beginnings and the field to which he is unquestionably best suited. The old-time manager is, in short, passing once more into the state of mere business man. His ramble into the drama as a producing manager shows signs of being at an end. And while this end may not yet be directly at hand, it is daily looming larger and larger; and it would, indeed, seem safe to predict that his evanescence into his pristine shape—the shape of business man pure and simple—is even nearer at hand than our eyes may lead us believe.

The day of the new order is here. The old manager, who thought Dan Nunzio the name of the Italian bootblack on the corner and who believed Sue Dermann was probably the name of some German manicure girl in a Broadway hotel, is being relegated to the counting room, and in his place there has come, or at least there is coming, the new manager, a fellow of taste and of ideals, a man to whom the

theatre represents something more than a mere show bourse, something finer than a mere display platform for the kind of *passe-temps*, however remunerative, in which false whiskers are made to pass for characterization and in which any allusion to the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railway is looked on as an amazingly fine piece of wit. To this new type of producing manager, the stage represents something more than an elevation designed primarily for the celebration of the symmetrical female limb at the expense of symmetrical dramatic literature, for the apotheosis of the humor of the pancake derby over the wit of quick mind and observing eye.

Of these newcomers, one of the most engaging is Mr. Arthur Hopkins, and it is he I here introduce to you. It is said of Hopkins—it is being said and repeated daily—that he is the most promising of all the new producers. This is absurd. Hopkins is not promising: he has already fulfilled his promise. I do not, obviously, mean to say that he has proved himself a great innovator, a great imagi-

nation, or a great producer. He has proved himself nothing of the kind. But he *has* proved himself—quite patently, we are dealing here only in comparisons—the best new man in the American theatre. What he will prove himself to-morrow—for good or bad—I am no crystal-gazer to predict.

In the first place, Hopkins probably possesses to a greater degree than any other American producing manager—new or old—the editorial instinct so far as respectable dramatic manuscripts are concerned. It was this instinct that permitted him, where his contemporaries had failed, to detect in Miss Gates' "Poor Little Rich Girl" the fine play that was there. It was this instinct that caused him to see in a music show libretto ("Good Gracious Annabelle") not a mere music show libretto, but a first-rate fantastic farce. It was this instinct that saw the smart humors in the Kummer comedy, "A Successful Calamity," where even so astute a man—and so sharp a judge of popular values—as George Cohan had failed. It is this instinct that has caused

him to plan the production of a play by one of the foremost literary artists of the country, a play on which it is safe to assume no other producer would take a chance. Hopkins knows literary values and the value of viewpoint. Even in his failures there are easily to be detected the points which he himself saw in the manuscripts, points one can readily sympathize with and, even where failure was deserved, understand. He is never shoddy, never cheap, never illiterate.

Nor is Hopkins a mere idealist. He is, at bottom, a first-rate theatre man. And where the records show that he has failed to extract profit from a good play like "The Deluge," they also show that he could see the monetary winkings in a mere melodrama like "On Trial" after so experienced a firm as the Selwyns had peremptorily rejected it. It takes money to put on good plays that fail. And Hopkins, feeling his ground, knows the trick. And this trick makes him not less the idealist, but more. It is one thing to make money with a bad play. It is another thing to spend the money one has

made on one bad play in putting on two good plays.

Hopkins is the first producing manager we have had in the later theatre of America to give actual encouragement to the \* American playwright. Not the sort of American playwright whom such producers as the old-time producing managers encouraged—the Charles Kleins, Charles T. Dazeys and such—but the American with something to say and with skill to say it and with humor and fancy to address and embellish it. For the slangy jokes of the telephone girls of the plays of the Owen Davises he has substituted the polite wit of Clare Kummer. For the pasteboard and tinsel imaginings of the dying Little Evas and the electric light gymnasiums of the Peter Grimms of the American drama, he has substituted the happy fancies of Eleanor Gates. For the drama of Central Office detectives and expert counterfeiters, he has given us the drama of human souls of such as Hennig Berger. Where other producers elect to fail with plays arguing eloquently that every Japanese valet is a military

agent of the Mikado in disguise, Hopkins elects to fail with plays like "The Devil's Garden" and "The Happy Ending"—bad plays, true enough, but plays at least possessed of a theme that may be listened to without an amused sense of disgust by such persons as are tutored beyond the point of believing that all dachshunds come from Germany and that no policeman is able to start a sentence without prefacing his remarks with a "begorra."

When, in the desert, the traveler sees even the mirage of an oasis, he is grateful. It is quite possible that I am somewhat too enthusiastic about Hopkins. He may disappoint us in the days to come; he may lead us on and may then make mock of us. But I scarcely feel that he will. And even if he should, his record to the moment stands still intact. In slightly more than two years he has brought freshness, life and renewed interest to our native theatre. And the best part of it is that he has done this by centering his attention first and last upon the manuscript of the play. The play is his weapon, from beginning to end. His



pleasant scenic investitures are just that—pleasant. No more. His lighting, borrowed from abroad, and his movable proscenium, borrowed from the same source, are respectively agreeable and workable. But not important in themselves. His play is ever the thing. And upon it he wisely fixed almost the whole of his attention. What were his beginnings in the world, what was his training, I do not know and care less. But he has an instinctive sense of form, a sense of beauty, that seem to prevail upon him when his eyes roll across the pages of the submitted play manuscript. Further, there is in him nothing of the toady or snob. An Englishman's altiloquent name means nothing to him. He would as lief—indeed, rather—consider the play of some obscure Washington Square amateur like Mr. Philip Moeller. Merit is the one consideration. He would make a first-rate editor for a first-rate magazine.

Nor do names of actors mean everything with him, as they do with the majority of his colleagues. True, he has his share of so-called stars, some capable,

some pretty bad; but he also has always with him his hitherto unknown Geraldine O'Briens and Roland Youngs. The new man of talent, the new woman of talent, meet hospitable ear.

As a director, Hopkins is possessed of uncommon good sense. A follower, consciously or unconsciously, of the method obtaining in the famous Little Theatre of Berlin and the Carltheater of Vienna—and the Manchester Theatre, which imitates this method—he has demonstrated that he places his trust entirely in a superlatively rigid simplicity of treatment. He abjures all hocus-pocus, all showy pretence. He hires capable actors, tells them briefly what the play is about and how he desires them to interpret it, and then, with merely a slight touch here, a slight touch there, visited upon the picture during the process of rehearsal, permits the machine to get under way. No elaborate crossings from right to left, no leanings on mantelpieces, no haltings at doorways—none of the excess baggage of the Broadway direction. He presents his manuscript in the manner of a story sim-

ply and easily read. His production of "A Successful Calamity" demonstrates his way of going about things and the results accruing therefrom. I understand, on unimpeachable authority, that Hopkins spoke not more than a dozen words at most during all the time he was making this manuscript ready for public unveiling. He uses no booming megaphone, like Mr. Augustus Thomas, to direct the pantaloons and stagehands. He employs no peep-hole, like Mr. Belasco, to watch in secret the progress of his mimes and then, in the final rehearsal throes to descend upon the scene and "mysteriously," "uncannily," hit upon this defect and that. He does not divest himself of coat and waistcoat and, in gaudy suspenders, direct the rehearsal in terms of a Robert Service Yukon ballad. He seems to appreciate that if the play is a good play and worth doing at all it will pretty nearly play itself.

Details bother him little. He is for generalities. The important thing is to him, in direction, the important thing. He is an innovator only in the sense that

he is not an innovator. He is not concerned with bizarre new drapings for the proscenium arch or fancy lighting effects the like of which never were on land or ship or stages that are built in the shape of doughnuts or any other such marks of the ubiquitous modern innovator. His theatre is at once as old fashioned and as new as a bronze plaque—and as attractive.

I have admitted that I may be unduly commendatory to Hopkins, that I may seem to be jumping in to praise him a trifle ahead of the appropriate time. But I am happy in the indiscretion, if indiscretion it is. For he has set himself against all that is snide and all that is pompously cheap in our professional showshop. And not only against what is shoddy and pretentiously mean on the stage of that showshop, but likewise against what is vulgar in its auditorium. With the opening of his new theatre, he has placed himself on record against the typical gang of regular first-nighters who

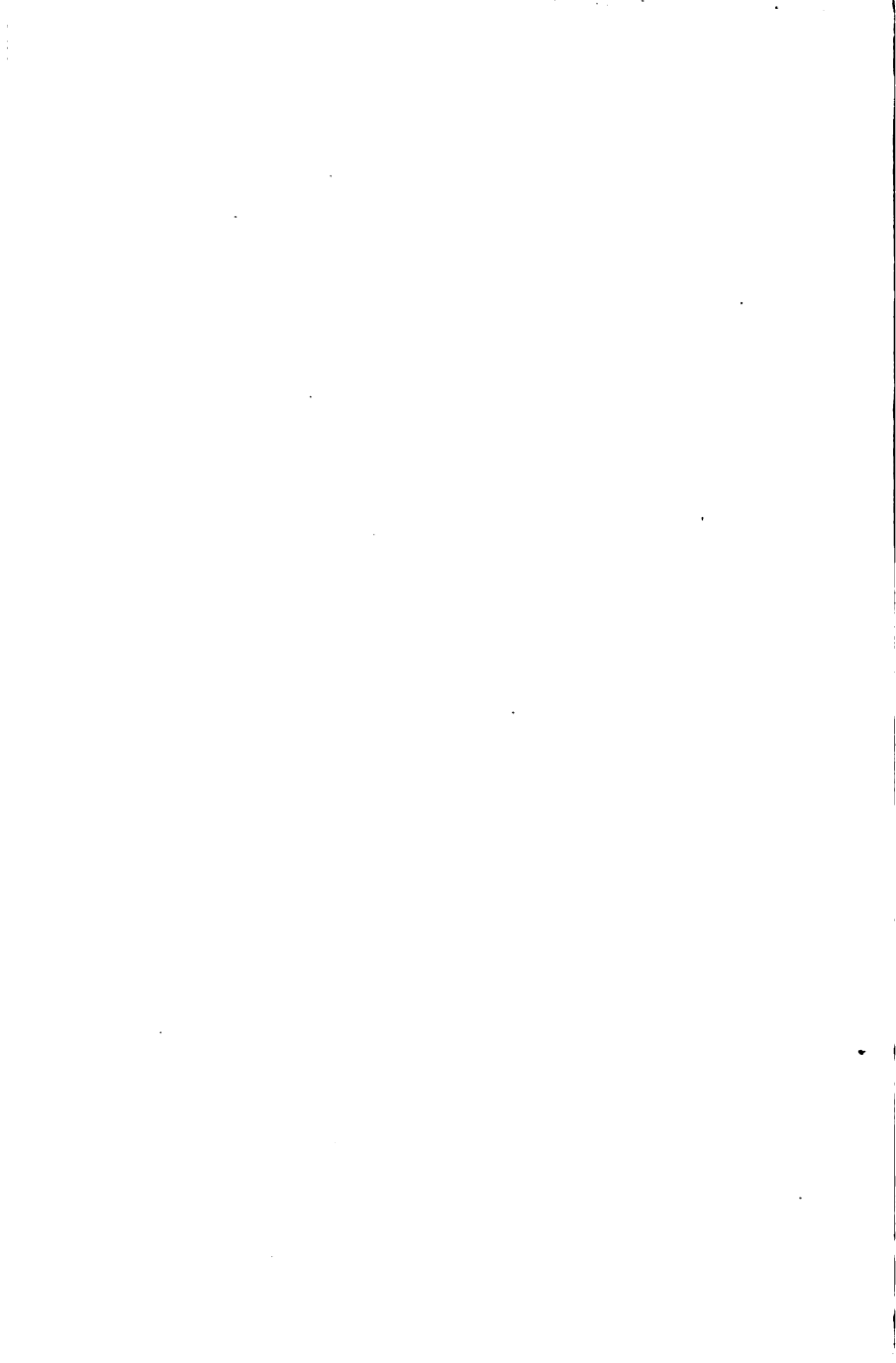
with loud ignorance and illiterate manner have smelled out of court so much that has been intrinsically worth while in drama, and whose obstreperous blockheads have in the past gone so far in spelling the failure of such praiseworthy plays as "General John Regan," and "The Incubus," and "Where Ignorance is Bliss." Upon this unhealthy crew, this *mélange* of songwriters, moving-picture actors, champagne impresarios and Broadway posturers, Hopkins has bestowed a certificate of discharge. He will, if the power is within him, sound the death knell of the death watch.

If there is a new word in the American professional theatre, that word is Hopkins. It means to this professional theatre what the name of such organizations as the Washington Square Players means currently to the American amateur theatre, and what this latter name will very, very shortly mean also to the professional theatre: the meaning of finer drama more intelligently played and more beautifully

staged. To Hopkins, with all his defects,  
with all his faults, and with his future  
still ahead of him, my very best wishes,  
and an extra pull of my thumb.

GEORGE JEAN NATHAN.

New York, January, 1918.



## HOW'S YOUR SECOND ACT ?

### I

Under the present system of theatrical producing in America the fate of the theatre is very largely in the hands of a comparative few—the New York producing managers. Their aims, inclinations and tastes very largely determine what shall pass as dramatic art in all the centers, large and small, where people gather for illusionment.

It is a mistake to say that the public demands what it shall have since this presupposes some standard already fixed by the public, and up to now, so far as its taste in the theatre is concerned, the American public has not set up one requirement. A play may be without merit in writing, acting or direction—it may not contain a single thought worthy the utterance of a backward child—its humor may be the brand that pulls chairs from under unsuspecting fat men—its drama the kind that brings the wayward boy into the cottage as mother is praying for his return—its acting may be of the smile-



coldly - light - a - cigarette - you're - a villain brand, look-patient-and-tender-under-all-injustice—and-you're-a-hero brand—it may be false, trivial, vulgar, untrue, unreal, inept, deadly dull, duller than churches or mid-west landscapes or dead love letters—and yet be received by pleased multitudes throughout the land as “a great show”—an appellation which conveys a bitter truth—it is a great show—a great show of the pathetic lack of discernment of the untutored majority.

I repeat that there are no standards, no requirements, no demands. The whole matter is left wholly in the hands of a few New York producers, who, upon choosing a play, choose a play that appeals to their tastes, their preference, their understanding. A play outside their understanding cannot possibly appeal to them, so necessarily the theatrical fare of America is determined by the best understanding of this few.

Being one who clings to the belief that the theatre can be a great agency for development—that it can greatly aid in the spread of culture and breeding and the

growth of sounder logic—that it can ultimately reach a place where it helps mankind to a better human understanding, to a deeper social pity and to a wider tolerance of all that is life, I am somewhat awed by the responsibility that is borne so lightly by the New York few, and I am wishing that I could hold a revival among them and exhort them and pray for them and to them, and bring about a great redemption in the light of which we would all cast off the glamor of hits and long runs and number eight companies and press agent's eulogies and turn our faces toward America and say to all America: "If there is any way we can make life a little better, a little gentler, a little kinder—we will try to find the way."

For I am not one of those who believe there is no popular place in America for worthy drama. It is a taste that is cultivated, but cannot be cultivated until the people have repeated opportunities to respond to it.

And then some one asks: "Where are the good plays?" The good plays will come when good plays are produced, for

there is no one who suffers more under present conditions than the author. Any potential playwright must necessarily be discouraged by the types of plays that are chosen for production. In any form of art the acceptance of the spurious is inevitably a douche to the birth of merit. A real artist will not stoop to readjustment, and on the other hand he is fearful of exposing his work to the gaze of a judge who is pleased with mediocrity.

How many good plays have never been written because the authors witnessed a few Broadway successes we shall never know. How many bad plays are written for the very same reason I am reminded of by every mail.

One condition is responsible for the other. The great day for the theatre will come when we decide that henceforth our intentions shall be honorable. There will be an appreciative public, authors who respond to its appreciation, and producers who bring them together.

## II

The chief criticism of temporary producing is that it lacks either policy or design. The average production is the result of no fixed coördination. It has frequently been said of my productions, that they conveyed a certain sustained illusion that seemed not to be of the theatre. I believe this in a sense to be true, for it is the result of a definite experimental policy which I have followed vigorously, bringing it more and more to bear in each new production.

What was originally experimental has now become a fixed method, and I hope definitely to demonstrate that there is a way to insure invariably the projection of nearly all the values a play may possess.

From the very beginning I had an abhorrence of all that is generally termed theatric. It seemed cheap and tawdry, the trick of the street fakir. I thought for a long time that my prejudice was personal and not well founded. But, finally, all

\* protest and all new seeking began naturally to fall into line with a theory of direction that had slowly been evolving in my mind—the theory which for the want of a better term I have defined as Unconscious Projection.

Briefly, the basis of the theory is this: Complete illusion has to do entirely with the unconscious mind. Except in the case of certain intellectual plays the theatre is wholly concerned with the unconscious mind of the audience. The conscious mind should play no part.

The theatre is always seeking unanimous reaction. It is palpably evident that unanimous reaction from conscious minds is practically impossible. Seat a dozen people in a room, present them any problem which you ask them consciously to solve, and you will get nearly as many different reactions as there are people; but place five thousand people in a room and strike some note or appeal that is associated with an unconscious idea common to all of them, and you will get a practically unanimous reaction. In the theatre I do not want the emotion that rises

out of thought, but the thought that rises out of emotion. The emotional reaction must be secured first. )

The problem now arises: "How can we in the theatre confine ourselves to the unconscious mind?" The hypnotist has supplied us with the answer: "Still the conscious mind." The hypnotist's first effort is to render inoperative the conscious mind of the subject. With that out of the way he can direct his commands to an undistracted unconscious and get definite reactions. The subject has no opportunity to think about it.

In the theatre we can secure a similar result by giving the audience no reason to think about it, by presenting every phase so unobtrusively, so free from confusing gesture, movement and emphasis, that all passing action seems inevitable, so that we are never challenged or consciously asked why. ) This whole treatment begins first with the manuscript, continues through the designing of the settings, and follows carefully every actor's movement and inflection. If, throughout, this attitude of easy flow can be maintained the complete

illusionment of the audience is inevitable.

At first glance one might say that any method which discards conscious digestion must necessarily be limited in scope. The answer is that we begin by discarding conscious irritation, proceed to an unconscious introduction, and then abide by the conscious verdict, for, inevitably, all the unconscious reaction is wasted if the conscious ultimately rejects us. Or to put it more simply, if you give our story complete attention and then reject us, we have no complaint; but if we feel that you have not properly felt our story because of confusing distractions, we must necessarily feel guilty as to our way of projection.

This method entails sweeping readjustments. To begin with, author, director, scene designer and actor must become completely the servants of the play. Each must resist every temptation to score personally. Each must make himself a free, transparent medium through which the whole flows freely and without obstruction. No one at any moment can say, "Ah, this moment is mine! I shall show what can be

done with it." There is no part of the play that is done for the benefit of any one. It must all be inevitable, impersonal and untrammelled. It requires a complete surrender of selfishness. In fact, it demands of everyone the honest rigidity of the true artist, who will stoop to nothing because it is effective or conspicuous or because "it goes."

It is the opposite of all that has become traditional in the theatre. It is the establishing of the true community spirit in a work that is essentially community work, and it is not the glorious adoption of an ideal, but the stern necessity for self-preservation which the very method impresses. For woe be unto the one person who is out of key with the scheme once it has been set in operation. He will inevitably make himself look hopelessly out of place, and the more he struggles to stand out the farther aloof and more hopelessly adrift will he become.

It commands honesty and unselfishness, and nothing recommends it to me more than this—nothing could be more convincing proof of its rightness.



### III

The note of unconscious projection must first be struck by the director. If he can not get his effects in this way, he can scarcely hope that the people with him will succeed. It is always my aim to get a play completely prepared without anyone realizing just how it was done. I want the actors to be unconscious of my supervision. I want whatever direction they require to come to them without their realization. I want them to be unconscious of the movement and the "business" of the play. I want it all to grow with them so easily that when time for the first performance comes they scarcely realize that anything in particular has been done.

The first step in unselfishness must be taken by me. I must renounce at the outset all temptation to be conspicuous in direction, to issue commands, to show how well I can read a line or play a scene, or slam a door; to ridicule or get laughs

at a confused actor's expense, to openly criticize. I must renounce all desire to be the boss, or the great master, or the all-knowing one. I must guide the ship by wireless instead of attempting to drag it through the water after me. There are any number of actors who have been with me who firmly believe that they received practically no direction, and that is exactly as it should be. When I discover that an actor is becoming conscious of me I know there is something wrong some place, and it is usually with me.

The two essentials in this kind of direction are for the director to know exactly what he wants and to make sure that he can get what he wants from the people he has selected. These two conditions put an end to all confusion at the outset.

Uncertainty in direction must inevitably result in uncertainty in performance. When actors discover that a director can not make up his mind just how a scene should be played, and when they see him experimenting with them they instantly become conscious of something lacking,

either in the play itself or in the director. This is a dangerous thought to set up. A company under these conditions becomes wobbly, and the first tendency of a wobbly actor is to overplay. Once an actor believes himself to be on thin ice he invariably steps down harder. A scene that is born in uncertainty is rarely well played.

The director is the guide. The play is the unknown region through which he leads the actor. He must know the paths and the turnings so well that he never hesitates. For once he falters, wondering if he is headed right, the actor inevitably begins to look around for his own way out.

My feeling about the birth of a play is that it gradually becomes an individuality, that it becomes a personality of which the different actors are organs or members. I do not see ten or twenty individuals moving about. I see only one thing made of ten or twenty parts that is moving. So long as it moves properly I am totally unconscious of its parts. The moment I become conscious of a part and lose the movement of the whole I know

that something is wrong. It is the unfamiliar sound in the engine that warns one that some part is not functioning properly. That is the time to stop the play and investigate. It may be a very tiny thing—a movement at a time when all should be still—a speech when there should be silence—a pause when something should be happening—an unwarranted change of tempo, or any one of a hundred minor or major things that remove concentration from the whole.

✓ The stripping process begins early. I eliminate all gesture that is not absolutely needed, all unnecessary inflections and intonings, the tossing of heads, the flickering of fans and kerchiefs, the tapping of feet, drumming of fingers, swinging of legs, pressing of brows, holding of hearts, curling of moustaches, stroking of beards and all the million and one tricks that have crept into the actor's bag, all of them betraying one of two things—an annoying lack of repose, or an attempt to attract attention to himself and away from the play.

Every movement on the stage should mean something. The spectator follows every movement, and no movement has any right to his attention unless it has some significance.

I never plan the "business" of a play in advance. I know where the entrances are as the scene is first designed, but frequently after going over an act once these are changed.

I am opposed to the old method of marking out the "business" in advance, because at the outset it confines the movement and tends to a fixity that hampers free flow. The first two or three times through an act I let the actors roam about the scene and invariably the "business" solves itself. The movement arrived at in this way has the advantage of having been born in action, and there is essentially a feeling of life about it that one cannot get by marking directions in a manuscript. Automatically all falseness of movement is denied admission, all crosses, dropping down stage, falling up stage, exchanging chairs, circling pianos, wrestling with furniture, and all the

strange conduct that directors of past years have relied upon to keep actors busy. The police crusade of some time ago that kept actors moving along Broadway was only an open-air phase of stage direction, as most actors have suffered it for years.

Extreme simplification—that is what I strive for incessantly—not because I like simplicity. It isn't a matter of taste or preference—it is a working out of the method of Unconscious Projection. It is the elimination of all the non-essentials, because they arouse the conscious mind and break the spell I am trying to weave over the unconscious mind. All tricks are conscious in the mind of the person who uses them, and they must necessarily have a conscious appeal. I want the unconscious of the actors talking to the unconscious of the audience, and I strive to eliminate every obstacle to that. I finally become a censor. I must say what shall not pass—and therein I believe lies the whole secret of direction.

## IV

The true test of performance is the ease with which it is accomplished. My chief objection to all theatric devices is that they indicate a straining for effect which defeats itself. The strain is a thing personal to the author, actor or director, and it instantly distracts the audience from the effect to the effort. Just as an audience suffers for a singer who is struggling for a note that seems dangerously out of reach, it suffers for an actor who stresses himself for an effect. An actor should be given nothing to do that he can not do easily, and furthermore he should find the very easiest way he can accomplish whatever is assigned to him. This is an essential part of his self-elimination. He must think of the play as a clean ball. Whenever it is tossed to him he should pass it on without smearing it with his perspiration. An ideal company would end the performance with a spotless ball. An actor must say to himself, "How can I do

this without being noticed," instead of "What can I do to make myself stand out." With the latter query he begins to try, and with trying comes strain, and with strain artificiality and discomfort. He accomplishes what he set out to do. He stands out much as a carbuncle does.

The whole system of personal emphasis in the American theatre has led to the present unadvanced state of the actor. There is no greater proof of its fallacy than its failure. All are straining for personal success. If they only knew that the greatest success will come to those who can most completely submerge the personal. Theirs is essentially an art where they must serve unreservedly, and the great vacancies in the theatre are awaiting actors big enough in mind and character to surrender themselves completely, strip themselves of every conscious trick, disdaining to court approval but commanding it by the very honesty of their aims.

I firmly believe that an actor's mental attitude is instantly conveyed to an audience. I further believe that an audience



unconsciously appraises his character. It soon discovers if he is all actor or part man, and its appraisal of his performance is more determined by its unconscious exploration of his unconscious than by any particular thing he does. Invariably the actors whom the public has loved have been people who, in themselves, possessed great lovable qualities. They were not people who in their rôles assumed a lovable nature. \*

We can not give actors qualities they do not possess, but I am only seeking to point out that the audience usually gets what is inside of an actor much more clearly than what he actually does, and an actor can not approach his work selfishly without conveying his attitude to the public. We let all of this pass under the vague terms of personality and magnetism, but I do not believe there is anything vague or mysterious about it. I believe unconscious appraisal reveals to us the character of many people we do not know in the least. We get their intent from what they do, and it is by their intent that we know them.

I do not believe it possible for me to pose as a genuine lover of the theatre, seeking in my way to bring it somewhere nearer the position I believe it should hold. If I am posing my work must betray me, and betray me to many people who will never see me. We of the theatre are touching the public mind, and if we complain of our state it is because the public mind has sounded ours.

It isn't dramatic schools we want or courses in playwriting. All these are purely surface-scraping efforts that get nowhere. What we all need is a thorough mental house-cleaning. We need some one to bring home to us clearly that ours is a profession that deals solely with the public mind. It is that which we must satisfy, and the only instrument that we can employ is our mind—the mind of the theatre, and before we can make it effective it must be high—high in purpose, high in performance—for the low mind must fail, must destroy itself.

This may sound like moralizing. It has nothing to do with morals. It has only to do with love—love of our work, love of

all that is best in the theatre, contempt for all that is tawdry and vain and penny-catching. And I believe this to be the attitude that spells success for all of us.

There is nothing so ridiculously non-commercial as the present commercial theatre. It is puttering about in a puny, one-sheet way with what could at once be a great public agent and a great industry. Instead it is wasteful, stupid, standing about grimacing like a tired street-walker, praying that its charms might entice two dollars and the tax from some lonesome sailor.

## V

Self-elimination, unconscious speaking to unconscious, an unconscious that easily touches the common complexes of the many, these are the fundamental needs of the playwright. I am assuming that he has average writing ability and a sufficient knowledge of the theatre to be practical. Beyond these his work depends entirely upon his ability to surrender all that is personal emphasis and to enter into that mind that is common to all.

There are brilliant exceptions, notably Shaw, who obviously seeks to leave a heavy imprint of himself on all that passes through him. Yet he must pay the price. The world questions his sincerity, suspects him of primarily seeking to register his own impression of himself. And his plays, especially his later ones, are somehow seen through a shaggy beard that never will get out of the way. It is an amusing beard, to be sure, brittle, at times irresistibly penetrating, but some-

how it always remains a beard, and one prays for the play to have a shave, for Shaw to be taken into another room, with his writing hand left behind, free and untrammelled, just to wander on for a time forgetting its close relationship to the beard, that sorry blanket that has muffled a great mind.

The playwright must regard himself as the instrument, not the virtuoso. He must be a free medium, refraining from all conscious temptation to express his opinions or to reveal his rare gifts of expression. If his opinion is honestly founded, it will come out inevitably through the conflict of characters. The characters will speak and not the playwright.

When a playwright talks, the spell is broken. The audience must be as unconscious of design on his part as it is on the part of the ideal actor. The whole thing must just happen. It is not something to be made in the window.

Necessarily the playwright on approaching his work must leave himself free for all expression that may come through him, committed to nothing, bound

by nothing, rule of drama, rule of logic, rule of conduct, or rule of life. He should have no fixed idea of predominating characters. He should leave his characters to work out their own predominance. He should be committed to no climax, no conclusion, no ending. He should refuse to twist his play or swerve his course. If he would be master, he must surrender completely, servant to all that honestly seeks expression through him, to the extent that he is capable of unconscious submergence and free from conscious design his work will approach greatness.

He should so freely manipulate his characters that their movement is natural, that they enter and leave the action without being taken by the scruff of the neck.

He should beware of taking the audience up blind alleys. All that he establishes should lead somewhere. He should avoid every situation, every speech, every word that brings the audience back to conscious adjustment.

With the author, as with the actor and the producer, the ultimate result will rest on what he himself is, for before the night

is over the audience will have made an unconscious appraisal of him that will be close to the fact. "By their works ye shall know them."

With the present standards in the American theatre success very largely depends on the extent to which an audience can associate itself with the central characters of the play—the extent to which the audience plays the play. As yet we have no considerable audience that can enjoy an abstract view of a play. They must be a part of the play themselves or there is no play. They like to play Cinderella and Prince Charming and Raffles and Cleopatra and the various characters that had those amazing experiences which can only be felt in a Harlem flat by proxy.

All the repressed desires burst forth into flame in the theatre, and for a few hours they have full sway, to be silenced again until dreams have their way.

There is a well-known producer who always sums up failures by saying: "There was no one to root for." In his

way he has expressed all that any analytical psychologist could offer.

Again many people find a certain satisfaction in the theatre in seeing all that they can never hope to be set up for ridicule.

The ignorant urchin girl who drops into a wealthy home and instantly confuses everyone with her astounding disdain for their way of life is sure of a warm place in many hearts. The reason is rather pathetic, since it implicates an utter surrender to the existing condition of all who are pleased, for no one laughs at a condition he believes will one day be his.

There has been considerable cheap trading in this form of comedy and drama in our theatre—too great a tendency to paint well-bred people as artificial and immoral bores, utterly heartless and stupid, and to exalt the poor for their sterling qualities and amazing sense of humor. It would be a more constructive drama that showed that heartaches are heartaches in the Avenue or on the Bowery, and that love and trouble and weakness and



strength are pretty much common to all kinds of people, and that no one in the world has a monopoly of anything, especially trouble.

## VI

As to the "new" scenery, much has been said and written, and most of it beside the point.

One's position in the matter is entirely determined by which mind he thinks the stage has to do with, the conscious or the unconscious.

✓ Realistic settings are designed wholly for conscious appeal. An attempt at exact reproduction challenges the conscious mind of the audience to comparison. Comparison of the scene as it is offered with the auditor's conscious knowledge of what it is supposed to reproduce. If a Child's Restaurant in all its detail is offered it remains for the audience to recall its memory photograph of a Child's Restaurant and check it up with what is shown on the stage. If the butter-cake stove is in place, and the "Not Responsible for Hats" sign is there, and if the tiling is much the same, then the producer has done well. He has been faithful to Child's, and

whatever credit there is in being faithful to Child's should be unstintedly awarded him.

Unfortunately while the audience has been doing its conscious checking up, the play has been going, and going for nothing, since any form of conscious occupation must necessarily dismiss the play. Further than that the result of the whole mental comparing process is to impress upon the auditor that he is in a theatre witnessing a very accurate reproduction, *only remarkable because it is not real*. So the upshot of the realistic effort is further to emphasize the unreality of the whole attempt, setting, play and all. So I submit that realism defeats the very thing to which it aspires. It emphasizes the faithfulness of unreality.

All that is detail, all that is photographic, is conscious. Every unnecessary article in a setting is a continuing, distracting gesture beckoning constantly for the attention of the audience, asking to be noticed and examined, insisting upon its right to scrutiny because it belongs. But what of the play in the meantime? What

are mere words against a fine old spinet, or delicate situation, in front of a grandfather's clock that is crying, "Look at me! I am two hundred years old—the real thing—I've survived a thousand better plays than this. Look at me! To hell with the play! Tick-tock-tick-tock—brrrrr." And there is the dear old spinning wheel and a bootjack and some family chromos and Uncle Abram's sword right under his crayon, and endless knick-knacks, whatnots and dust-collectors, and your eye wanders over each labored detail and later on you are conscious that some one is speaking. It is some actor. "What is he saying?" "Something about Aunt Jennie?" Who is Aunt Jennie?" Aunt Jennie has been the subject of conversation for three minutes. If you are interested in the play, it is important that you know about Aunt Jennie. But what matters, you saw Uncle Abram's sword, and from the size of it Uncle Abe must have been some boy.

✓ (Detail has been the boon of the American theatre for twenty years, detestable, irritating detail, designed for people with

no imagination—people who will not believe they are in a parlor unless they see the family album.

And on the other side of the world the unenlightened Chinese for centuries have been presenting drama to unimaginative people wherein scenes were never changed, and palaces, forests, legions and hordes were summoned by the wave of a property-man's bamboo stick.

But, thank Heaven, there was a Gordon Craig, who brought the imagination of the Orient to England, and of course England would have none of him. Germany swallowed him through the gullet of Max Reinhardt, and the "new" movement was on. It spread to Russia, to France, to Italy, to America, to every place but England, where it was born.

Here we have failed to grasp its full significance. There is still a feeling that it is some sort of affectation. It would be like us to call a revolt from affectation affectation.

What is all the discussion about? How can there be any discussion? Isn't it a palpable fact that the only mission of set-

things is to suggest place and mood, and once that is established let the play go on? Do we want anything more than backgrounds? Must we have intricate wood-turning and goulash painting? If so, we have no right in the theatre. We have no imagination. And a theatre without imagination becomes a building in which people put paint on their faces and do tricks, and no trick they perform is worth looking at unless they take a reasonable chance of being killed in the attempt.

The whole realistic movement was founded on selfishness—the selfish desire of the producer or scene painter to score individually, to do something so effective that it stood in front of the play and shrieked from behind it.

It was my good fortune to find an un-  
selfish artist, Robert Edmond Jones.  
Jones only hopes for one thing for his settings—that no one will notice them, that they will melt into the play. Naturally for this very reason they were conspicuous at first not because of what they were, but because of what people had been ac-

customed to. But gradually his work is being noticed less and less, and Jones knows that that means he is succeeding. That's the size man he is. And when the day comes that no one ever mentions his settings, he will breathe deeply and say, "I have done it."

He is the true artist. He wants nothing for Jones. He wants what is right for the thing we are doing. Given twenty actors with a spirit as fine as his, and I will promise you a reaction such is now only a dream.

## VII

Author, Actor, Artist, Director, all working as a harmonious unit, each supplying just the suggestion that is needed at the time it is needed—all speaking the same language, as it were—each fusing into the other so there is no telling where one begins and the other leaves off—that is what lifts performance from the one-finger exercise to the orchestrated composition.

How many times do we see performances wherein each actor is pursuing a different method and the scene painter disdains to have anything to do with any of them.

Even in the better European theatres there is frequently evident a strange lack of agreement between actors as to the way of the play, and likewise a disagreement between the gesture of the play and the gesture of the background.

With the introduction of the plain background it became imperative that the



entire action and movement of the play be simplified since every movement was instantly thrown forward in much bolder relief. Formerly with the cluttered settings much of the gesticulation and restlessness was swallowed up by the furniture and hangings. I sometimes believe that much of the old-fashioned acting was due to an unconscious effort on the part of the actor to extricate himself from the furniture.\* He had a sort of uncomfortable feeling that he was talking from under a couch. I believe that similarly stage centre was partly popular with the actor because it was usually the one clear space in the scene where the oppressiveness of the upholstery was not quite so much felt.

For some reason the European directors failed to make full readjustment when they introduced the simplified settings. And without readjustment they would have been better off to have continued with the realistic settings because they at least did not set up such a distinct and shrieking clash as was inevitable with a Gordon Craig setting and Robert Mantell acting.

In Reinhardt's production of "The

Living Corpse" the settings for the most part were comparatively simple. Moissi, in the leading rôle, gave a characterization as completely free from all that was personal emphasis and exaggeration as I ever hope to see. And yet surrounding him were some of the strangest of pre-historic methods. The contrast was grotesque. How it was possible for actors to be in the same city with Moissi and persist in their ridiculous methods seemed beyond explanation. How it was possible for a director to reconcile in his own mind such totally different methods in the same performance was equally puzzling.

Yet I saw the same thing in each performance at the Deutches and even at The Kammerspiele. There seemed no initial determination as to the spirit of the performance. It seemed like a Romeo of 1880 playing scenes with a Juliet of 1918 in a setting that was not quite in accord with either of them.

It is impossible while speaking of Reinhardt to pass without further reference to Alexander Moissi. He is fixed vividly in my mind as the one person who stands for

all that is ideal in the actor's attitude. Were Moissi to walk into a manager's office seeking leading rôles, he would probably never get an engagement. He is undersized, frail, short-sighted, plain to the point of homeliness—not the homeliness that is attractive. But the man has something, and when it begins to speak to you the homeliness is gilded by a sort of glorification. He is irresistible. You hang on every word, every movement. His face is so strangely telegraphic that you watch it for every signal. Somehow what he says doesn't matter, what he does seems almost nothing, yet he takes you so completely that the theatre disappears. You are in space with a glowing soul and it seems to bring you into complete understanding of all that is human, frail and strong, suffering and triumphant. He seems to lead you into a sort of self-exploration and reveals to you impulses of which you have been only vaguely aware, emotions that you have but faintly felt. What is it that the man has? It surely cannot be explained in terms of the theatre. Perhaps his is a great soul so fine that it is

close to the surface and easy of revelation. Perhaps his command of us is by right of his innate fineness, his deep-seated, unconscious love for all that is human, all the faults and virtues, all that is ugly and beautiful, all that is we.

Imagine anyone trying to teach Moissi to act. Imagine trying to secure by technique, by trick of voice or gesture, by stilted strutting, or vapid ingratiation the sort of reaction that Moissi commands with the use of none of these. He has no devices. He seeks no effect. He commands by pure earnestness and by an impersonal concentration that is almost uncanny. He is at all times the servant of the play, and its master.

Were I obliged to let my whole theory <sup>of</sup> Unconscious Projection rest on one example I would choose Moissi, the one actor I have seen who is most completely liberated from all the traditions of acting and the theatre, the one man who apparently dismisses completely all idea of self, success or conquest, the one man who has reduced simplification and elimination to its seeming last analysis.

And I would ask you to choose from all the rest of the world the actor most highly trained in all the mechanical science of the theatre, the handsomest actor if you would, and actor of overpowering physical charm and manner, an actor with a voice that could sound all the notes from the pipe-organ to the ukelele, an actor whose sense of light and shade and values and contrasts had been trained to their highest effectiveness, and I would have you give them parts in the same play. Let your actor play the lover and Moissi the janitor or let Moissi play the lover and your actor the janitor. It wouldn't matter in the least. I would leave the decision with you.

Does this sound like too much praise for a man? It isn't praise for a man. No man is worth it. It is bowing down before an idea. And Moissi stands for that idea. To the extent that other actors can succeed in adopting it they will approach his high place. What we can accomplish by ourselves is of no importance since in a brief time it must disappear. What we can accomplish in the projection and fos-

tering of an idea is of all importance since that will go on long after we are forgotten. If while we are here we can place <sup>\*</sup> our hands on the revolving globe and give it a slight push in the right direction the result must necessarily outlive our effort but if we are merely hanging on, going around with it, trying to make ourselves believe we are occupying a conspicuous place in the scramble it will be but a short time before we are thrown off and for a moment at least the world will be relieved of the burden of swinging us around.

## VIII

The removal of the fourth wall in no sense removes from the stage director's responsibility the fact that the wall is still there. Yet practically all stage direction not only removes the fourth wall for the benefit of the audience but as a matter of fact eliminates all sense of it.

It is rather an amazing kind of direction that lines two or three people at the curtain line facing the audience to play a scene. As a matter of fact they are comfortably carrying on a conversation while lined up facing a wall.

Of course this would be an extraordinary set of positions to take and the only upshot is the complete removal of all sense of illusion as to the confines of the room. It wanders out over the footlights and through the auditorium and for all we can tell the carriage-starter may be standing in the millionaire's library.

It is well at the outset so to arrange the furniture of the room that there is a

suggestion as to just where the fourth wall is. By obliquing furniture at the curtain line, or by having it backed to the audience, a suggestion as to the confines of the room can easily be obtained and this immediately helps in the arrangement of the "business." Obviously scenes played down close will not be directly facing the audience. In order to have a scene played facing the audience it is essential to have a suggestion of some furnishing closer to the audience than the place of the scene. I like whenever possible clearly to establish the room line by having some one sit almost back to the audience playing into the room or up stage.

Throughout the play I refrain in interior scenes from having speeches read directly to the audience unless people are so placed that they would obviously have to avoid doing so.

The value in this is not only to contribute to the illusion of the room and to make the positions of the people seem plausible but there is a sort of exclusion from the actor's attention of the audi-



ence which I invariably seek to emphasize. It is quite essential for the reaction that I seek that we never do anything for the benefit of the audience.

The elimination of the "aside" was largely defeated by the tendency of direction to read dialogue to the audience. An actor who obviously turns from the person to whom he is talking to say a line of the dialogue to the audience is reading an "aside." He is taking a line away from the play and presenting it to the audience. In the same way the soliloquy is still with us. Many times we see actors extricate themselves from the scene they are playing to acquaint the audience with something connected with the plot. This is obviously soliloquy, the only difference being that the actor is not alone on the stage while he indulges in it.

In fact there are few of the faults of the very old theatre that are not still with us. The prepared exits, the speeches at the door, the exits laughing, exits sobbing, exits hesitating, the standing in door-ways to watch some one off so that

any applause they may receive will not be interfered with, are still with us.

There is no travesty of the old methods which with slight readjustment would not hold for much that passes as stage direction today.

The whole difficulty can be traced to one source, trying to make good instead of trying to be good, and the latter is so much easier than the former than one wonders why they persist.

Honesty! Honesty! Honesty! That is all we want. Do things as they should be done and let the results take care of themselves.

We are not tired people with trained bears anxious to hear the rattle of pennies in tin cups. We are bigger than pennies and approval. We are big enough to demand our own approval and when we have that we can dismiss from our minds those who do not approve us and those who do approve all that we have passed and cast off and would not resume for all the approval of a world chorus sung every day at sundown.

## IX

Possibly there is no influence more deadly to the development of the theatre in America than indifferent dramatic critics. Once they reach the weary state of mind that robs them of the enthusiasm to assail the spurious and foster the real, the one road for advanced theatre propaganda is closed.

If they seem lax there is much to be said in their defence. They have wandered the desert of theatre mediocrity and if the mirages attract them it is only evidence of their thirst. They are not alone. Many others who still stubbornly cling to the idea that the theatre should play some significant part in their lives have equally parched tongues.

Yet the dramatic critic is the sentry. He has no right to get tired and when he reaches the state of complete weariness he should ask for relief. When he is too tired to challenge the tawdry and

too weary to welcome new promise his day of service is done.

I have very much the same idea of the dramatic critic as I have of the author, the actor, the artist and the director. In the first place I would have him love the theatre, and in the next place I would have him liberated from any desire to be personally effective in connection with it.

By loving the theatre I mean that I would have him jealous of it, ready always to resent and resist its misuse, utterly without sympathy or regard for all that he felt false and penny-snaring in it, cruel to those who have no regard for it, callous to all the cheap devices that have cluttered up a potentially fine institution, castigating producers who impose spurious wares, slaying directors and actors who obviously bring no thought or honesty to their work, discontented with all that is unreal, deteriorating and emaciating.

I would see them constantly scrutinizing the intent, the intent of the author, producer, actor, everybody concerned. "Why do you do this?" On their decision

I would have the nature of their criticism rest.

As a producer I pray that whenever I resort to cheap tricks they flay me alive. If I choose a play of no merit I ask them to castigate me. If I can't find actors and direct them into giving a performance that at least seems intelligent I ask them to crucify me.

I want no praise for bad work. I scorn the man who offers it. I want always to have my intent examined, my execution scrutinized. If they find me stooping to sham devices, if they find me careless or crass, cheap or vulgar, my head is on the block for them.

And I would like to see them the same with every other producer. I would like them to shout for better and better, and I believe if they do better will come.

But for God's sake I pray to you, "Don't get sleepy and full of meaningless mumblings, and don't be impressed by anyone unless he impresses you by his new work. Don't write obituaries and epitaphs and reminiscences. Have nothing to do with morgues or graveyards. Keep

alive and awake and insistent and enthusiastic and forever ready to knock the first head that shows in the wrong alley and grab any hand that shows in the right one.

"And don't use criticism to impress yourself. You haven't any right to do it. You, yourself, mean nothing in the matter. You are simply the instrument, as we are the instruments, and if you are a good instrument you need not be concerned about how you come out. Others will take care of that and much better than you can."







